

PART I

Poverty and Industry

*I Memoir on Pauperism*¹ (*Tocqueville*)

Part I

THE PROGRESSIVE DEVELOPMENT OF PAUPERISM AMONG CONTEMPORARIES AND THE METHODS USED TO COMBAT IT

When one crosses the various countries of Europe, one is struck by a very extraordinary and apparently inexplicable sight.

¹ Tocqueville delivered this *Memoir* to the Royal Academic Society of Cherbourg in 1835. Tocqueville's participation in this local society was obviously related to the fact that the Chateau de Tocqueville was located a few miles up the coast from Cherbourg and that his family was among the oldest in the *cotentin* peninsula. The date of the *Memoir* makes it appear that Tocqueville may have wanted to gain some reputation as an expert on social problems of local interest with an eye toward his political career. When making his first bid for national office in 1837, he considered running for Cherbourg where he had built up his political contacts, but finally opted for the neighboring electoral district of Valognes (see the letter of Tocqueville to Royer-Collard, October 19, 1837, Ms 3992, Bibliothèque de l'Institut de France). The *Memoir on Pauperism* was reprinted once in the *Bulletin des sciences économiques et sociales du comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques* in 1911. It remains one of his least known writings, primarily because it appeared originally in the proceedings of a provincial academy and was not reprinted in Beaumont's

The countries appearing to be most impoverished are those which in reality account for the fewest indigents, and among the peoples most admired for their opulence, one part of the population is obliged to rely on the gifts of the other in order to live.

Cross the English countryside and you will think yourself transported into the Eden of modern civilization—magnificently maintained roads, clean new houses, well-fed cattle roaming rich meadows, strong and healthy farmers, more dazzling wealth than in any country of the world, the most refined and gracious standard of the basic amenities of life to be found anywhere. There is a pervasive concern for well-being and leisure, an impression of universal prosperity which seems part of the very air you breathe. At every step in England there is something to make the tourist's heart leap.²

Now look more closely at the villages; examine the parish registers, and you will discover with indescribable astonishment that one-sixth of the inhabitants of this flourishing kingdom live at the expense of public charity. Now, if you turn to Spain or even more to Portugal, you will be struck by a very different sight. You will see at every step an ignorant and coarse population; ill-fed, ill-clothed, living in the midst of a half-uncultivated countryside and in miserable dwellings. In Portugal, however, the number of indigents is insignificant. M. de Ville-neuve estimates that this kingdom contains one pauper for every twenty-five inhabitants. Previously, the celebrated geog-

edition of Tocqueville's works. But the work was not immediately lost in obscurity after its publication and was quoted authoritatively by contemporaries. See, for example, Isidore Alauzet, *Essai sur les peines et le système pénitentiaire* (Paris, 1842), pp. 272-73. On the general background to the *Memoir* consult Shelby T. McCloy, *Government Assistance in Eighteenth-Century France* (Durham, N.C., 1946); Ferdinand Dreyfus, *Un philanthrope d'autrefois: La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, 1747-1827* (Paris, 1903), and *L'Assistance sous la Seconde République* (Paris, 1907); Anatole Weber, *Essai sur le problème de la misère* (Paris, 1913); Louis Chevalier, *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses* (Paris, 1958); and Jean Baptiste Duroselle, *Les débuts du catholicisme social en France (1822-1870)* (Paris, 1951).

² Tocqueville's account here is based on his first trip to England in 1833. See Tocqueville, *Journeys to England and Ireland*, ed. J.-P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence and K. P. Mayer (London and New Haven, Conn., 1958), pp. 42-74.

rapher Balbi gave the figure as one indigent to every ninety-eight inhabitants.³

Instead of comparing foreign countries among themselves, contrast the different parts of the same realm with each other, and you will arrive at an analogous result; you will see on the one hand the number of those living in comfort, and, on the other, the number of those who need public funds in order to live, growing proportionately.

According to the calculations of a conscientious writer whose theories, however, I do not fully accept, the average number of indigents in France is one pauper to twenty inhabitants. But immense differences are observable between the different parts of the kingdom. The department of the Nord, which is certainly the richest, the most populous, and the most advanced from all points of view, reckons close to a sixth of its population for whom charity is necessary. In the Creuse, the poorest and least industrial of all our departments, there is only one indigent to every fifty-eight inhabitants. In this statistical account, La Manche is listed as having one pauper for every twenty-six inhabitants.

I think that it is not impossible to give a reasonable explanation for this phenomenon. The effect that I have just pointed out is due to several general causes which it would take too long to examine thoroughly, but they can at least be indicated.

Here, to make myself clearly understood, I am compelled to return for a moment to the source of human societies. I will then go rapidly down the river of humanity to our own times.

We see men assembling for the first time. They come out of the forest, they are still savages; they associate not to enjoy life but in order to find the means of living. The object of their efforts is to find a refuge against the intemperance of the seasons and sufficient nourishment. Their imaginations do not go beyond these goods, and, if they obtain them without exertion, they consider themselves satisfied with their fate and slumber in their

³ Villeneuve-Bargemont, *Economie politique chrétienne ou recherches sur la nature et les causes du paupérisme en France et en Europe*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1834), II, 587–89. This was a pioneer study of French Social Catholicism by a former prefect of the exiled Bourbon dynasty.

idle comfort. I have lived among the barbarous tribes of North America; I pitied them their destiny, but they do not find it at all a cruel one. Lying amidst the smoke of his cabin, covered with coarse clothes—the work of his hands or the fruit of the hunt—the Indian looks with pity on our arts, considering the refinements of our civilization as a tiresome and shameful subjugation. They envy us only our weapons.⁴

Having arrived at this first age of societies, men therefore still have very few desires, they feel hardly any needs but ones analogous to those of animals; they have merely discovered the means of satisfying them with the least effort through social organization. Before agriculture is known to them they live by the hunt. From the moment that they have learned the art of producing harvests from the earth, they become farmers. Everyone then reaps enough to feed himself and his children from the field which happens to fall into his hands. Private property is created, and with it enters the most active element of progress.

From the moment that men possess land, they settle. They find in the cultivation of the soil abundant resources against hunger. Assured of a livelihood, they begin to glimpse that there are other sources of pleasure in human existence than the satisfaction of the more imperious needs of life.

While men were wanderers and hunters, inequality was unable to insinuate itself among them in any permanent manner. There existed no outward sign which could permanently establish the superiority of one man and above all of one family over another man or family; and this sign, had it existed, could not have been transmitted to his children. But from the moment that landed property was recognized and men had converted the vast forests into fertile cropland and rich pasture, from this moment, individuals arose who accumulated more land than they required to feed themselves and so perpetuated property in the hands of their progeny. Henceforth abundance exists; with

⁴ On the American Indians see Tocqueville, *Journey to America*, ed. Mayer (New Haven, Conn., 1962), Chap. XIII, "A Fortnight in the Wilds," especially p. 367; and Beaumont, *Marie, or Slavery in the United States* (Stanford, Calif., 1958), Appendix K, "Note on the Present Condition of the Indian Tribes of North America."

superfluity comes the taste for pleasures other than the satisfaction of the crudest physical needs.

The origins of almost all aristocracies should be sought in this social stage. While some men are already familiar with the art of concentrating wealth, power, and almost all the intellectual and material pleasures of life in the hands of a small minority, the half-savage crowd is still unaware of the secret of diffusing comfort and liberty among all. At this stage of human history men have already abandoned the crude and proud virtues born of the forest. They have lost the advantages of barbarism without acquiring those of civilization. Tilling the land is their only resource, and they are ignorant of the means of protecting the fruits of their labors. Placed between a savage independence that they no longer desire, and a political and civil liberty that they do not yet understand, they are defenseless against violence and deceit, and seem prepared to submit to every kind of tyranny provided that they are allowed to live or rather vegetate in their fields.

At this point landed property is concentrated without restriction; power is also concentrated in a few hands. War menaces the private property of each citizen instead of endangering the political condition of peoples, as happens at present. The spirit of conquest, which has been the father and mother of all durable aristocracies, is strengthened and inequality reaches its extreme limits.

The barbarians who invaded the Roman Empire at the end of the fourth century were savages who had perceived what landed property could offer and who wanted to monopolize its advantages. The majority of the Roman provinces that they attacked were populated by men already long accustomed to farming, whose habits were softened by peaceful agricultural occupations, but among whom civilization had not yet made great enough progress to enable them to counteract the primitive boldness of their enemies. Victory gave the barbarians not only the government but the property of the third estate. The cultivator became a tenant-farmer instead of an owner. Inequality was legalized; it became a right after having been a fact. Feudal society was organized and the Middle Ages were

born. If one looks closely at what has happened to the world since the beginning of societies, it is easy to see that equality is prevalent only at the historical poles of civilization. Savages are equal because they are equally weak and ignorant. Very civilized men can all become equal because they all have at their disposal similar means of attaining comfort and happiness. Between these two extremes is found inequality of conditions, wealth, knowledge—the power of the few, the poverty, ignorance, and weakness of all the rest.

Able and learned writers have already studied the Middle Ages, others are still working at it, among them the secretary of the Academic Society of Cherbourg. I therefore leave the enormous task of doing so to men more qualified than I am.

At this point, I want to examine only a corner of that immense tableau of the feudal centuries. In the twelfth century, what has since been called the “third estate” did not yet exist. The population was divided into only two categories. On the one hand were those who cultivated the soil without possessing it; on the other, those who possessed the soil without cultivating it.

As for the first group of the population, I imagine that in certain regards its fate was less deserving of pity than that of the common people of our era. These men were in a situation like that of our colonial slaves, although they played their role with more liberty, dignity, and morality. Their means of subsistence was almost always assured; the interest of the master coincided with their own on this point. Limited in their desires as well as in their power, without anxiety about a present or a future which was not theirs to choose, they enjoyed a kind of vegetative happiness. It is as difficult for the very civilized man to understand its charm as it is to deny its existence.

The other class presented the opposite picture. Among these men hereditary leisure was combined with continuous and assured abundance. I am far from believing, however, that even within this privileged class the pursuit of pleasure was as preponderant as is generally supposed. Luxury without comfort can easily exist in a still half-barbarous nation. Comfort presupposes a numerous class all of whose members work together to render life milder and easier. But, in the period under dis-

cussion, the number of those not totally absorbed in self-preservation was extremely small. Their life was brilliant, ostentatious, but not comfortable. One ate with one's fingers on silver or engraved steel plates, clothes were lined with ermine and gold, and linen was unknown; the walls of their dwellings dripped with moisture, and they sat in richly sculptured wooden chairs before immense hearths where entire trees were consumed without diffusing sufficient heat around them. I am convinced that there is not a provincial town today whose more fortunate inhabitants do not have more true comforts of life in their homes and do not find it easier to satisfy the thousand needs created by civilization than the proudest medieval baron. If we look carefully at the feudal centuries, we will discover in fact that the great majority of the population lived almost without needs and that the remainder felt only a small number of them. The land was enough for all needs. Subsistence was universal; comfort unheard of.

It was necessary to establish this point of departure in order to make clear what follows.⁵

As time passes, the population which cultivates the soil acquires new tastes. The satisfaction of the basic necessities is no longer sufficient. The peasant, without leaving his fields, wants to be better housed and clothed. He has seen life's comforts and he wants them. On the other hand, the class which lived off the land without cultivating the soil extends the range of its pleasures; these become less ostentatious, but more complex, more varied. Thousands of needs unknown to the medieval nobles stimulate their descendants. A great number of men who lived on the land and from the land leave their fields and find their livelihood by working to satisfy these newly discovered needs. Agriculture which was everyone's occupation is now only that of the majority. Alongside those who live in leisure from the productivity of the soil arises a numerous class who live by working at a trade but without cultivating the soil.

Each century, as it emerges from the hand of the Creator, extends the range of thought, increases the desires and the

⁵ On the idea of the point of departure in Tocqueville's analysis, see Drescher, *Tocqueville and England* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), pp. 30-31.

power of man. The poor and the rich, each in his sphere, conceive of new enjoyments which were unknown to their ancestors. In order to satisfy these new needs, which the cultivation of the soil cannot meet, a portion of the population leaves agricultural labor each year for industry.

If one carefully considers what has happened in Europe over several centuries, it is certain that proportionately as civilization progressed, a large population displacement occurred. Men left the plow for the shuttle and the hammer; they moved from the thatched cottage to the factory. In doing so, they were obeying the immutable laws which govern the growth of organized societies. One can no more assign an end to this movement than impose limits on human perfectibility. The limits of both are known only by God.

What has been, what is the consequence of this gradual and irresistible movement that we have just described? An immense number of new commodities have been introduced into the world; the class which had remained in agriculture found at its disposal a multitude of luxuries previously unknown. The life of the farmer became more pleasant and comfortable; the life of the great proprietor more varied and more ornate; comfort was available to the majority. But these happy results have not been obtained without a necessary cost.

I have stated that in the Middle Ages comfort could be found nowhere, but life everywhere. This sentence sums up what follows. When almost the entire population lived off the soil great poverty and rude manners could exist, but man's most pressing needs were satisfied. It is only rarely that the earth cannot provide enough to appease the pangs of hunger for anyone who will sweat for it. The population was therefore impoverished but it lived. Today the majority is happier but it would always be on the verge of dying of hunger if public support were lacking.

Such a result is easy to understand. The farmer produces basic necessities. The market may be better or worse, but it is almost guaranteed; and if an accidental cause prevents the disposal of agricultural produce, this produce at least gives its harvester something to live on and permits him to wait for better times.

The worker, on the contrary, speculates on secondary needs

which a thousand causes can restrict and important events completely eliminate. However bad the times or the market, each man must have a certain minimum of nourishment or he languishes and dies, and he is always ready to make extraordinary sacrifices in order to obtain this. But unfortunate circumstances can lead the population to deny itself certain pleasures to which it would ordinarily be attracted. It is the taste and demand for these pleasures which the worker counts on for a living. If they are lacking, no other resource remains to him. His own harvest is consumed, his fields are barren; should such a condition continue, his prospect is only misery and death.

I have spoken only of the case where the population restricts its needs. Many other causes can lead to the same effect: domestic overproduction, foreign competition, etc.

The industrial class which gives so much impetus to the well-being of others is thus much more exposed to sudden and irremediable evils. In the total fabric of human societies, I consider the industrial class as having received from God the special and dangerous mission of securing the material well-being of all others by its risks and dangers. The natural and irresistible movement of civilization continuously tends to increase the comparative size of this class. Each year needs multiply and diversify, and with them grows the number of individuals who hope to achieve greater comfort by working to satisfy those new needs rather than by remaining occupied in agriculture. Contemporary statesmen would do well to consider this fact.

To this must be attributed what is happening within wealthy societies where comfort and indigence are more closely connected than elsewhere. The industrial class, which provides for the pleasures of the greatest number, is itself exposed to miseries that would be almost unknown if this class did not exist.

However, still other causes contribute to the gradual development of pauperism. Man is born with needs, and he creates needs for himself. The first class belongs to his physical constitution, the second to habit and education. I have shown that at the outset men had scarcely anything but natural needs, seeking only to live; but in proportion as life's pleasures have become more numerous, they have become habits. These in turn

have finally become almost as necessary as life itself. I will cite the habit of smoking, because tobacco is a luxury which has even permeated the wilderness and which has created an artificial pleasure among the savages that they must obtain at any price. Tobacco is almost as indispensable to the Indian as nourishment; he is apt to resort to begging when he lacks either. Here is a cause of beggary unknown to his forefathers. What I have said of tobacco is applicable to a multitude of objects which could not be sacrificed in civilized life. The more prosperous a society is, the more diversified and more durable become the enjoyments of the greatest number, the more they simulate true necessity through habit and imitation. Civilized man is therefore infinitely more exposed to the vicissitudes of destiny than savage man. What happens to the second only from time to time and in particular circumstances, occurs regularly to the first. Along with the range of his pleasures he has expanded the range of his needs and leaves himself more open to the hazard of fortune. Thus the English poor appear almost rich to the French poor; and the latter are so regarded by the Spanish poor. What the Englishman lacks has never been possessed by the Frenchman. And so it goes as one descends the social scale. Among very civilized peoples, the lack of a multitude of things causes poverty; in the savage state, poverty consists only in not finding something to eat.

The progress of civilization not only exposes men to many new misfortunes; it even brings society to alleviate miseries which are not even thought about in less civilized societies. In a country where the majority is ill-clothed, ill-housed, ill-fed, who thinks of giving clean clothes, healthy food, comfortable quarters to the poor? The majority of the English, having all these things, regard their absence as a frightful misfortune; society believes itself bound to come to the aid of those who lack them, and cures evils which are not even recognized elsewhere. In England, the average standard of living a man can hope for in the course of his life is higher than in any other country of the world. This greatly facilitates the extension of pauperism in that kingdom.⁶

⁶ See Nassau Senior, *Statement of the Provision for the Poor and of the*

If all these reflections are correct it is easy to see that the richer a nation is, the more the number of those who appeal to public charity must multiply, since two very powerful causes tend to that result. On the one hand, among these nations, the most insecure class continuously grows. On the other hand, needs infinitely expand and diversify, and the chance of being exposed to some of them becomes more frequent each day.

We should not delude ourselves. Let us look calmly and quietly on the future of modern societies. We must not be intoxicated by the spectacle of its greatness; let us not be discouraged by the sight of its miseries. As long as the present movement of civilization continues, the standard of living of the greatest number will rise; society will become more perfected, better informed; existence will be easier, milder, more embellished, and longer. But at the same time we must look forward to an increase of those who will need to resort to the support of all their fellow men to obtain a small part of these benefits. It will be possible to moderate this double movement; special national circumstances will precipitate or suspend its course; but no one can stop it. We must discover the means of attenuating those inevitable evils which are already apparent.

Part II

There are two kinds of welfare. One leads each individual, according to his means, to alleviate the evils he sees around him. This type is as old as the world; it began with human misfortune. Christianity made a divine virtue of it, and called it charity. The other, less instinctive, more reasoned, less emotional, and often more powerful, leads society to concern itself with the misfortunes of its members and is ready systematically to alleviate their sufferings. This type is born of Protestantism and has developed only in modern societies.⁷ The first type is a private virtue; it escapes social action; the second on the contrary

Condition of the Labouring Classes in a Considerable Portion of America and Europe (London, 1835).

⁷ Tocqueville here follows the argument of Villeneuve-Bargemont, in *Economie politique chrétienne*, I, 22–25, and *passim*.

is produced and regulated by society. It is therefore with the second that we must be especially concerned.

At first glance there is no idea which seems more beautiful and grander than that of public charity. Society is continually examining itself, probing its wounds, and undertaking to cure them. At the same time that it assures the rich the enjoyment of their wealth, society guarantees the poor against excessive misery. It asks some to give of their surplus in order to allow others the basic necessities. This is certainly a moving and elevating sight.

How does it happen that experience destroys some of these beautiful illusions? The only country in Europe which has systematized and applied the theories of public charity on a grand scale is England. At the time of the religious revolution under Henry VIII, which changed the face of England, almost all the charitable foundations of the kingdom were suppressed; and since their wealth became the possession of the nobles and was not at all distributed among the common people, the poor remained as numerous as before while the means of providing for them were partly destroyed. The numbers of the poor therefore grew beyond measure, and Elizabeth, Henry's daughter, struck by the appalling miseries of the people, wished to substitute an annual levy furnished by the local governments for the sharply reduced alms-giving caused by the suppression of the convents.

A law promulgated in the forty-third year of that ruler's reign⁸ declared that in each parish, overseers of the poor would be

⁸ (Tocqueville's note: See (1) *Blackstone*, Bk I, Chap. IV; (2) The principal results of the enquiry made in 1833 on the condition of the poor, contained in the book entitled *Extracts from the information received by His Majesty's commissioners as to the administration and operation of the Poor-laws*; (3) *The Report of the Poor-law commissioners*; (4) and finally the law of 1834 which was the result of all these efforts.) Tocqueville received most of these documents early in 1835 from Nassau William Senior (1790–1864), one of the eminent English economists of his time and a co-author of the *English Poor-Law Amendment Act* of 1834. The library at the chateau de Tocqueville contains a copy of the act, autographed by Senior. Tocqueville and Beaumont accepted Senior's introduction to the Poor Law report as the definitive study of pauperism in England. See the Introduction to the second edition of their *Système pénitentiaire* (1836), p. 20 note.

chosen, and that these overseers would have the right to tax the inhabitants in order to feed disabled indigents, and to furnish work for the others.

As time passed, England was increasingly led to adopt the principle of legal charity. Pauperism grew more rapidly in Great Britain than anywhere else. Some general and some special causes produced this unfortunate result. The English have surpassed the other nations of Europe in civilized living. All the observations that I made before are applicable to them; but there are others which relate to that country alone.

The English industrial class not only provides for the necessities and pleasures of the English people, but of a large part of humanity. Its prosperity or its miseries therefore depend not only on what happens in Great Britain but in a way on every event under the sun. When an inhabitant of the Indies reduces his expenditure or cuts back on his consumption, it is an English manufacturer who suffers. England is therefore the country in the world where the agricultural laborer is most forcefully attracted towards industrial labor and finds himself most exposed to the vicissitudes of fortune. In the past century an event has occurred which, looking at the rest of the world's development, can be viewed as phenomenal. For a hundred years landed property has been breaking up throughout the known world; in England it continues to concentrate.⁹ Medium-sized holdings disappear into vast domains. Large-scale agriculture succeeds small-scale cultivation. One could offer some interesting observations on this subject, but it would divert me from my chosen topic: the fact must suffice—it is a constant. The result is that while the agricultural worker is moved by his interest to abandon the plow and to move into industry, he is in a way thrust in the same direction in spite of himself by the agglomeration of landed property. Comparatively speaking, infinitely fewer workers are required to work a large estate than a small field. The land fails him and industry beckons in this double movement. Of the twenty-five million people of Great Britain, no

⁹ For further discussion of this see Tocqueville's *Journeys to England and Ireland*, pp. 71–72; *Oeuvres* (M), *Ancien Régime*, I, 43; and Drescher, *Tocqueville and England*, pp. 40–41, 48–52, 59–62, 120–124.

more than nine million are involved in agriculture. Fourteen million, or close to two-thirds, make their perilous way in commerce and industry.¹⁰ Thus pauperism was bound to grow more quickly in England than in countries whose civilization might have been equal to that of the English. Once having admitted the principle of legal charity, England has not been able to dispense with it. For two hundred years English legislation for the poor has revealed itself as nothing more than an extended development of the Elizabethan laws. Almost two and a half centuries have passed since the principle of legal charity was fully embraced by our neighbors, and one may now judge the fatal consequences which flowed from the adoption of this principle. Let us examine them successively.

Since the poor have an absolute right to the help of society, and have a public administration organized to provide it everywhere, one can observe in a Protestant country the immediate rebirth and generalization of all the abuses with which its reformers rightly reproached some Catholic countries. Man, like all socially organized beings, has a natural passion for idleness. There are, however, two incentives to work: the need to live and the desire to improve the conditions of life. Experience has proven that the majority of men can be sufficiently motivated to work only by the first of these incentives. The second is only effective with a small minority. Well, a charitable institution indiscriminately open to all those in need, or a law which gives all the poor a right to public aid, whatever the origin of their poverty, weakens or destroys the first stimulant and leaves only the second intact. The English peasant, like the Spanish peasant, if he does not feel the deep desire to better the position into which he has been born, and to raise himself out of his misery (a feeble desire which is easily crushed in the majority of men)—the peasant of both countries, I maintain, has no interest in working, or, if he works, has no interest in saving. He therefore remains idle or thoughtlessly squanders the fruits of his labors.

¹⁰ (Tocqueville's note: In France, the industrial class as yet constitutes only a quarter of the population.) Tocqueville failed to realize the extent to which the new English Poor Law changed the legal status of the poor. See T. H. Marshall, *Sociology at the Crossroads* (London, 1963), pp. 82–84.

Both these countries, by different causal patterns, arrive at the same result: the most generous, the most active, the most industrious part of the nation, which devotes its resources to furnishing the means of existence for those who do nothing or who make bad use of their labor.

We are certainly far from that beautiful and seductive theory that I expounded above. Is it possible to escape the fatal consequences of a good principle? For myself I consider them inevitable. Here I might be interrupted by a rejoinder: You assume that, whatever its cause misery will be alleviated; you add that public assistance will relieve the poor of the obligation to work. This states as a fact something questionable. What is to prevent society from inquiring into the causes of the need before giving assistance? Why could work not be imposed as a condition on the able-bodied indigent who asks for public pity? I reply that some English laws have used the idea of these palliatives; but they have failed, and understandably so.

Nothing is so difficult to distinguish as the nuances which separate unmerited misfortune from an adversity produced by vice. How many miseries are simultaneously the result of both these causes! What profound knowledge must be presumed about the character of each man and of the circumstances in which he has lived, what knowledge, what sharp discernment, what cold and inexorable reason! Where will you find the magistrate who will have the conscience, the time, the talent, the means of devoting himself to such an examination? Who would dare to let a poor man die of hunger because it's his own fault that he is dying? Who will hear his cries and reason about his vices? Even personal interest is restrained when confronted by the sight of other men's misery. Would the interest of the public treasury really prove to be more successful? And if the overseer's heart were unconcerned with such emotions, which are appealing even when misguided, would he remain indifferent to fear? Who, being judge of the joy or suffering, life or death, of a large segment of his fellow men, of its most dissolute, its most turbulent, its crudest segment, who would not shrink before the exercise of such terrible power? And if any of these intrepid beings can be found, how many will there be?

In any event such functions can only be exercised with a restricted territory. A large number must be delegated to do so. The English have been obliged to put overseers in every parish. What inevitably follows from all this? Poverty is verified, the causes of poverty remain uncertain: the first is a patent fact, the second is proved by an always debatable process of reasoning. Since public aid is only indirectly harmful to society, while the refusal of aid instantly hurts the poor and the overseer himself, the overseer's choice cannot be in doubt. The laws may declare that only innocent poverty will be relieved; practice will alleviate all poverty. I will present plausible arguments for the second point, equally based on experience.

We would like work to be the price of relief. But, first, is there always public work to be done? Is it equally spread over the whole country in such a way that you never see a good deal of work to be done with few people to do it in one district and in another many indigents to be helped but little work to be undertaken? If this difficulty is present at all times, doesn't it become insurmountable when, as a consequence of the progressive development of civilization, of population growth, of the effect of the Poor Law itself, the proportion of indigents, as in England, reaches a sixth, some say a quarter, of the total population?

But even supposing that there would always be work to do, who will take responsibility for determining its urgency, supervising its execution, setting the price? That man, the overseer, aside from the qualities of a great magistrate, will therefore also possess the talents, the energy, the special knowledge of a good industrial entrepreneur. He will find in the feeling of duty alone what self-interest itself would be powerless to create—the courage to force the most inactive and vicious part of the population into sustained and productive effort. Would it be wise to delude ourselves? Pressured by the needs of the poor, the overseer will impose make-work, or even—as is almost always the case in England—pay wages without demanding labor. Laws must be made for men and not in terms of a perfect world which cannot be sustained by human nature, nor of models which it offers only very occasionally.

Any measure which establishes legal charity on a permanent basis and gives it an administrative form thereby creates an idle and lazy class, living at the expense of the industrial and working class. This, at least, is its inevitable consequence, if not the immediate result. It reproduces all the vices of the monastic system, minus the high ideals of morality and religion which often went along with it. Such a law is a bad seed planted in the legal structure. Circumstances, as in America, can prevent the seed from developing rapidly, but they cannot destroy it, and if the present generation escapes its influence, it will devour the well-being of generations to come.

If you closely observe the condition of populations among whom such legislation has long been in force you will easily discover that the effects are not less unfortunate for morality than for public prosperity, and that it depraves men even more than it impoverishes them.

There is nothing which, generally speaking, elevates and sustains the human spirit more than the idea of rights.¹¹ There is something great and virile in the idea of right which removes from any request its suppliant character, and places the one who claims it on the same level as the one who grants it. But the right of the poor to obtain society's help is unique in that instead of elevating the heart of the man who exercises it, it lowers him. In countries where legislation does not allow for such an opportunity, the poor man, while turning to individual charity, recognizes, it is true, his condition of inferiority in relation to the rest of his fellow men; but he recognizes it secretly and temporarily. From the moment that an indigent is inscribed on the poor list of his parish, he can certainly demand relief, but what is the achievement of this right if not a notarized manifestation of misery, of weakness, of misconduct on the part of its recipient? Ordinary rights are conferred on men by reason of some personal advantage acquired by them over their fellow men. This other kind is accorded by reason of a recognized inferiority. The first is a clear statement of superiority; the second publicizes inferiority and legalizes it. The more extensive and

¹¹ On the role of "rights" in human relationships, see Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Mayer and Lerner (New York, 1966), pp. 219-21.

the more secure ordinary rights are, the more honor they confer; the more permanent and extended the right to relief is, the more it degrades.

The poor man who demands alms in the name of the law is, therefore, in a still more humiliating position than the indigent who asks pity of his fellow men in the name of He who regards all men from the same point of view and who subjects rich and poor to equal laws.

But this is still not all: individual alms-giving established valuable ties between the rich and the poor. The deed itself involves the giver in the fate of the one whose poverty he has undertaken to alleviate. The latter, supported by aid which he had no right to demand and which he may have had no hope of getting, feels inspired by gratitude. A moral tie is established between those two classes whose interests and passions so often conspire to separate them from each other, and although divided by circumstance they are willingly reconciled. This is not the case with legal charity. The latter allows the alms to persist, but removes its morality. The law strips the man of wealth of a part of his surplus without consulting him and he sees the poor man only as a greedy stranger invited by the legislator to share his wealth. The poor man, on the other hand, feels no gratitude for a benefit which no one can refuse him and which could not satisfy him in any case. Public alms guarantee life, but do not make it happier or more comfortable than individual alms-giving; legal charity does not thereby eliminate wealth or poverty in society. One class still views the world with fear and loathing while the other regards its misfortune with despair and envy. Far from uniting these two rival nations, who have existed since the beginning of the world and who are called the rich and the poor, into a single people, it breaks the only link which could be established between them. It ranges each one under a banner, tallies them, and, bringing them face to face, prepares them for combat.

I have said that the inevitable result of public charity was to perpetuate idleness among the majority of the poor and to provide for their leisure at the expense of those who work.

If the idleness of the rich, an hereditary idleness, merited by

work or by services, an idleness immersed in public consideration, supported by psychological complacency, inspired by intellectual pleasures, moralized by mental exercise—if this idleness, I say, has produced so many vices, what will come of a degraded idleness obtained by baseness, merited by misconduct, enjoyed in ignominy? It becomes tolerable only in proportion to the extent that the soul subjects itself to all this corrupting and degrading.

What can be expected from a man whose position cannot improve, since he has lost the respect of his fellow men which is the precondition of all progress, whose lot could not become worse, since, being reduced to the satisfaction of his most pressing needs, he is assured that they will always be satisfied? What course of action is left to the conscience or to human activity in a being so limited, who lives without hope and without fear? He looks at the future as an animal does. Absorbed in the present and the ignoble and transient pleasures it affords, his brutalized nature is unaware of the determinants of its destiny.

Read all the books on pauperism written in England, study the inquiries ordered by the British Parliament, look at the discussions which have taken place in the Lords and Commons on this difficult question. They boil down to a single deafening cry—the degraded condition into which the lower classes have fallen! The number of illegitimate children and criminals grows rapidly and continuously, the indigent population is limitless, the spirit of foresight and of saving becomes more and more alien to the poor. While throughout the rest of the nation education spreads, morals improve, tastes become more refined, manners more polished—the indigent remains motionless, or rather he goes backwards. He could be described as reverting to barbarism. Amidst the marvels of civilization, he seems to emulate savage man in his ideas and his inclinations.¹²

Legal charity affects the pauper's freedom as much as his morality. This is easily proved. When local governments are

¹² Tocqueville again applied this conception of contradictory patterns of social development in describing Manchester during his second trip to England in 1835.

rigorously obligated to aid the indigent, they necessarily owe relief only to the poor who reside in their jurisdiction. This is the only fair way of equalizing the public burden which results from the law, and of proportioning it to the means of those who must bear it. Since individual charity is almost unknown in a country of organized public charity, anyone whose misfortunes or vices have made him incapable of earning a living is condemned, under pain of death, to remain in the place of his birth. If he leaves, he moves through enemy country. The private interest within the parish, infinitely more active and powerful than the best organized national police could be, notes his arrival, dogs his every step, and, if he wants to establish a new residence, informs the public authority who takes him to the boundary line. Through their Poor Laws, the English have immobilized a sixth of their population. They have bound it to the earth like the medieval peasantry. Then, man was forced against his will to stay on the land where he was born. Legal charity keeps him from even wishing to move. That is the only difference between the systems. The English have gone further. They have reaped even more disastrous consequences from the principle of public welfare. The English parishes are so dominated by the fear that an indigent person might be placed on their rolls and acquire residency, that when a stranger whose clothes do not clearly indicate wealth temporarily settles among them, or when an unexpected misfortune suddenly strikes him, the municipal authorities immediately ask him to post bond against possible indigence, and if the stranger cannot furnish this security, he must leave.

Thus legal charity has not only taken freedom of movement from the English poor, but also from those who are threatened by poverty.

I know of no better way to complete this sad picture than by reproducing the following fragment from my notes on England. I traveled through Great Britain in 1833. Others were struck by the imposing prosperity of the country. I myself pondered the secret unrest which was visibly at work among all its inhabitants. I thought that great misery must be hidden beneath that brilliant mask of prosperity which Europe admires. This idea

led me to pay particular attention to pauperism, that hideous and enormous sore which is attached to a healthy and vigorous body.

I was staying at the house of a great proprietor in the south of England¹³ at the time when the justices of the peace assemble to pass judgment on the suits brought to court by the poor against the parish, or by the parishes against the poor. My host was a justice of the peace, and I regularly accompanied him to court. I find in my travel notes this portrait of the first sitting that I attended. It gives a short concise summary and clarifies everything said before. I am reproducing it with scrupulous exactness in order to render a true picture.¹⁴

The first individual who comes before the justices of the peace is an old man. His face is honest and ruddy, he wears a wig and is dressed in excellent black clothes. He seems like a man of property. However, he approaches the bar and passionately protests against the parish administration's injustice. This man is a pauper, and his share of public charity has just been unjustly diminished. The case is adjourned in order to hear the parish administrators.

After this hale and petulant old man comes a pregnant young woman whose clothes bear witness to recent poverty and who bears the marks of suffering on her withered features. She explains that some time ago her husband set out on a sea voyage, that since then she has received neither assistance nor news from him. She claims public charity but the overseer of the poor hesitates to give it to her. This woman's father-in-law is a well-to-do merchant. He lives in the very city where the court is sitting, and it

¹³ In 1833 Tocqueville was a guest at Longford castle in Wiltshire. His host was Lord Radnor (1779–1869), a Whig peer and an economic liberal. See *Journeys to England*, p. 51.

¹⁴ This portion of the *Memoir* is also published in Tome V, Vol. 2 of Tocqueville's *Oeuvres complètes: Voyages en Angleterre, Irlande, Suisse et Algérie*, pp. 21–23, and translated in *Journeys to England and Ireland*, pp. 53–54. There are some differences between the text of the *Oeuvres* and that of the *Memoir*. The latter is in the present tense instead of the past. It begins with the second case brought before the justices, the first having no connection with poor relief. The *Memoir's* account also contains a great many passages omitted from the text of the *Oeuvres* and leaves out some included there. One case even has different judicial decisions reported in the two texts. Tocqueville either touched up the *Memoir* text or the one which was published as part of his travel diary. The report published here is approximately 50 per cent longer than the account in the *Oeuvres*.

is hoped too, that in the absence of his son, he will certainly want to take responsibility for the maintenance of his daughter-in-law. The justices of the peace summon this man; but he refuses to fulfill the duties imposed on him by nature and not by law. The judges insist. They try to create remorse or compassion in this man's egoistic soul. Their efforts fail, and the parish is sentenced to pay the requested relief.

After this poor abandoned woman come five or six big and vigorous men. They are in the bloom of youth, their bearing is resolute and almost insulting. They lodge a complaint against their village administrators who refuse to give them work, or, for lack of work, relief.

The administrators reply that at the moment the parish is not carrying out any public work; and gratuitous relief is not required, they say, because the plaintiffs could easily find jobs with private individuals if they wanted to.

Lord X [Radnor], with whom I had come, tells me, "you have just seen in microcosm part of the numerous abuses which the Poor Law produces. That old man who came first quite probably has the means to live, but he thinks that he has the right to demand that he be supported in comfort, and he does not blush to claim public charity, which has lost all of its afflicting and humiliating character in the people's eyes. That young woman, who seems honest and unfortunate, would certainly be helped by her father-in-law if the Poor Law did not exist; but interest silences the cry of shame within him and he unloads a debt on the public that he alone ought to discharge. As for those young people who appeared last, I know them, they live in my village. They are very dangerous citizens and indeed bad subjects. They quickly squander the money they earn in taverns because they know they will be given relief. As you see, they appeal to us at the first difficulty caused by their own shortcomings."

The sitting continues. A young woman comes before the bar, followed by the overseer of the poor of her parish. She approaches without showing the slightest sign of hesitation, her gaze not at all lowered by a sense of shame. The overseer accuses her of having had the baby she is carrying through unlawful intercourse.

She freely admits this. As she is indigent and if the father remained unknown the illegitimate child would become a public charge along with its mother, the overseer calls on her to name the father; the court puts her under oath. She names a neighborhood peasant. The latter, who is present among the audience, very obligingly admits the accuracy of the fact, and the justices of the peace sentence him to support the child. The father and the mother retire and the incident does not excite the least emotion in an audience accustomed to such scenes.

After this young woman comes another. She comes willingly. She approaches the judges with the same shameless indifference shown by the first. She declares herself pregnant and names the father of the unborn child. This man is absent. The court adjourns the case in order to have him summoned.

Lord X tells me: "Here again are the harmful effects produced by the same laws. The most direct consequence of the Poor Laws is to make the public responsible for the support of deserted children who are the neediest of all indigents. Out of this comes the parish's desire to free themselves of the duty to support illegitimate children whose parents would be in a position to nurture them. Out of this also comes the paternity suits instigated by the parishes, proof of which is left to the woman. For what other kind of proof can one delude oneself into expecting in such a case? By obliging the parishes to become responsible for illegitimate children and permitting the paternity suits in order to ease this crushing weight, we have facilitated the misconduct of lower-class women as much as we could. Illegitimate pregnancy must almost always improve their material condition. If the father of the child is rich, they can unload the responsibility of raising the fruit of their common blunder on him; if he is poor, they entrust this responsibility to society. The relief granted to them in either way exceeds the expenses caused by the infant. So they thrive from their very vices, and it often happens that a woman who has become a mother several times over concludes a more advantageous marriage than the young virgin who has only her virtues to offer. They have a dowry of infamy."

I repeat that I wanted to change nothing from this passage in my diary. I have reproduced it exactly, because it seemed to me that it rendered the impressions that I would have the reader share with truth and simplicity.

Since the time of my English journey the Poor Law has been modified.¹⁵ Many Englishmen flatter themselves that these changes will exercise great influence on the indigents' future, on their morality, and on their number. I would like to be able to share these hopes, but I cannot do so. In the new law the present-day English have again reaffirmed the principle in-

¹⁵ See, among others, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Poor Law History, Part II, The Last Hundred Years* (London, 1929), I, 90-100; Marian Bowley, *Nassau Senior and Classical Economics* (London, 1937), pp. 317 ff.; S. E. Finer, *The Life and Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick* (London, 1952), pp. 70 ff.

troduced two hundred years ago by Elizabeth. Like that ruler, they have imposed on society the obligation of feeding the poor. That is quite enough. All the abuses that I have tried to describe are contained in it, just as the biggest oak is contained in the acorn that a child can hide in its hand. It needs only time to develop and grow. To want to create a law which regularly, permanently, and uniformly relieves indigency without also increasing the indigent population, without increasing their laziness along with their needs, and their idleness with their vices, is to plant an acorn and to be stunned when a stem appears, followed by leaves, flowers, and fruits, which in turn will one day produce a whole forest from the bowels of the earth.

I am certainly far from wanting to put the most natural, the most beautiful, and the most holy of virtues on trial. But I think that there is no principle, however good, whose every consequence can be regarded as good. I think that beneficence must be a manly and reasoned virtue, not a weak and unreflecting inclination. It is necessary to do what is most useful to the receiver, not what pleases the giver, to do what best serves the welfare of the majority, not what rescues the few. I can conceive of beneficence only in this way. Any other way it is still a sublime instinct, but it no longer seems to me worthy of the name of virtue.

I recognize that individual charity almost always produces useful results. It devotes itself to the greatest miseries, it seeks out misfortune without publicity, and it silently and spontaneously repairs the damage. It can be observed wherever there are unfortunates to be helped. It grows with suffering. And yet, it cannot be unthinkingly relied on, because a thousand accidents can delay or halt its operation. One cannot be sure of finding it, and it is not aroused by every cry of pain.

I admit that by regulating relief, charitable persons in association could infuse individual philanthropy with more activity and power. I recognize not only the utility but the necessity of public charity applied to inevitable evils such as the helplessness of infancy, the decrepitude of old age, sickness, insanity. I even admit its temporary usefulness in times of public

calamities which God sometimes allows to slip from his hand, proclaiming his anger to the nations. State alms are then as spontaneous as unforeseen, as temporary as the evil itself.

I even understand that public charity which opens free schools for the children of the poor and gives intelligence the means of acquiring the basic physical necessities through labor.

But I am deeply convinced that any permanent, regular, administrative system whose aim will be to provide for the needs of the poor, will breed more miseries than it can cure, will deprave the population that it wants to help and comfort, will in time reduce the rich to being no more than the tenant-farmers of the poor, will dry up the sources of savings, will stop the accumulation of capital, will retard the development of trade, will benumb human industry and activity, and will culminate by bringing about a violent revolution in the State, when the number of those who receive alms will have become as large as those who give it, and the indigent, no longer being able to take from the impoverished rich the means of providing for his needs, will find it easier to plunder them of all their property at one stroke than to ask for their help.

Let us summarize in a few words. The progressive movement of modern civilization will gradually and in a roughly increasing proportion raise the number of those who are forced to turn to charity. What remedy can be applied to such evils? Legal alms comes to mind first—legal alms in all forms—sometimes unconditional, sometimes hidden in the disguise of a wage. Sometimes it is accidental and temporary, at other times regular and permanent. But intensive investigation quickly demonstrates that this remedy, which seems both so natural and so effective is a very dangerous expedient. It affords only a false and momentary sop to individual suffering, and however used it inflames society's sores. We are left with individual charity. It can produce only useful results. Its very weakness is a guarantee against dangerous consequences. It alleviates many miseries and breeds none. But individual charity seems quite weak when faced with the progressive development of the industrial classes and all the evils which civilization joins to the inestimable goods it produces. It was sufficient for the Middle

Ages, when religious enthusiasm gave it enormous energy, and when its task was less difficult; could it be sufficient today when the burden is heavy and when its forces are so weakened? Individual charity is a powerful agency that must not be despised, but it would be imprudent to rely on it. It is but a single means and cannot be the only one. Then what is to be done? In what direction can we look? How can we mitigate what we can foresee, but not cure?

Up to this point I have examined the financial approach to poverty. But is this the only approach? After having considered alleviating evils, wouldn't it be useful to try to forestall them? Is there a way to prevent the rapid displacement of population, so that men do not leave the land and move into industry before the latter can easily respond to their needs? Can the total national wealth continue to increase without a part of those who produce this wealth having to curse the prosperity that they produce? Is it impossible to establish a more constant and exact relation between the production and consumption of manufactured goods? Can the working classes be helped to accumulate savings which would allow them to await a reversal of fortune in times of industrial calamity, without dying?¹⁶

At this point my horizon widens on all sides. My subject grows. I see a path opening up, which I cannot follow at this

¹⁶ When Beaumont visited England for a second time in 1837, Tocqueville requested his friend not to forget "our" savings banks. He asked Beaumont to get all the documents he could from Nassau Senior and his translator Henry Reeve, especially on the banking system in Scotland. See Yale Tocqueville-Beaumont Mss. C. I. a. 2, letters of Tocqueville to Beaumont May 14, 1837, and May 26, 1837; and C. XI. b.13, a note which specifically refers to the research in terms of the prevention of pauperism: "the working classes of England and Scotland are periodically exposed to frightful misery resulting from commercial crises. . . . 1. Do the workers form mutual aid societies among themselves? In general how are these associations organized? Are they numerous? Are they effective? What effects do they produce on the morality of the working classes? . . . 3. "How are the savings banks constituted? Are they tied, as in France, to the wealth of the State? Are they centralized in the Treasury? What is their development, their effects, their future? . . . I am indicating these diverse establishments to Gustave as the primary, but not the sole object of this question—anything that can be considered directly or indirectly as a preventive solution for pauperism interests me deeply." See also Beaumont's notes on English Banks, D. IV, j.

moment. The present *Memoir*, too short for my subject, already exceeds the limits that I had thought it necessary to set for myself. The measures by which pauperism may be combatted preventively will be the object of a second work which I hope respectfully to submit next year to the Academic Society of Cherbourg.¹⁷

¹⁷ The promised sequel to the *Memoir* never appeared and was apparently never written. It seems to have suffered the same fate as the continuation of his essay on the "Political and Social Condition of France," written for the *London and Westminster Review* in 1836. Both projects were pushed aside in deference to the task of writing the second part of *Democracy in America*, which took years longer than originally anticipated.